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Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation Of African Identities In The Colonial And Antebellum South



Synopsis

The transatlantic slave trade brought individuals from diverse African regions and cultures to a common destiny in the American South. In this comprehensive study, Michael Gomez establishes tangible links between the African American community and its African origins and traces the process by which African populations exchanged their distinct ethnic identities for one defined primarily by the conception of race. He examines transformations in the politics, social structures, and religions of slave populations through 1830, by which time the contours of a new African American identity had begun to emerge. After discussing specific ethnic groups in Africa, Gomez follows their movement to North America, where they tended to be amassed in recognizable concentrations within individual colonies (and, later, states). For this reason, he argues, it is possible to identify particular ethnic cultural influences and ensuing social formations that heretofore have been considered unrecoverable. Using sources pertaining to the African continent as well as runaway slave advertisements, ex-slave narratives, and folklore, Gomez reveals concrete and specific links between particular African populations and their North American progeny, thereby shedding new light on subsequent African American social formation.

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Customer Reviews

With its legacy of brutality and of the horrific overseas passage, the transatlantic slave trade may be imagined as the kidnapping of Africans without regard to nationality or ethnicity. Based on his research, however, Michael A. Gomez suggests that Africans, upon arriving in America, were

dispersed much more closely along ethnic and cultural lines than previously acknowledged. The underlying theme of his provocative work, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, is that while blacks eventually replaced their African ethnic identities with new racial ones after arriving in the American South, they retained much of their original cultures far longer than was originally suspected. Some of his most interesting evidence of this comes in the form of runaway-slave advertisements, which identified the slaves by their ethnic roots ("Dinah, an Ebo wench that speaks very good English"). By scrutinizing ex-slave narratives, stories, music, and even the location and nature of slave rebellions, Gomez pieces together a genealogy of blacks in the American South, attempting to examine their notions of identity. Of course, much is based on significant speculation, a fact that only underscores the difficulty of such scholarship. Gomez manages to present a wide range of information clearly as he expands on a wealth of recent research regarding the slave trade and the history of blacks in America, making *Exchanging Our Country Marks* a vast and creative exploration of African identity in the United States from 1526 to 1830.

Deeply researched in both African and North American sources."International Journal of African Historical Studies"[A] rare and creative inquiry into the origins of African identity in the United States from 1526 to 1830."Gaither Reporter"[A] conceptual "tour de force." No brief review can do justice to the nuances and complexities of Gomez's argument."Southern Cultures"Gomez has yoked his admirable grasp of recent advances in African historiography with a subtle and sensitive reading of slavery."American Historical Review""Gomez gracefully and distinctively enlivens slaves' understandings of themselves as Igbo, Muslims, parents, children, and--eventually--Africans and Americans."Journal of Southern History""*Exchanging Our Country Marks* is a rare and creative inquiry into the origins of African identity in the United States from 1526 to 1830."Gaither Reporter"*Exchanging Our Country Marks* is a conceptual "tour de force." No brief review can do justice to the nuances and complexities of Gomez's argument."Southern Cultures"[A] conceptual "tour de force," No brief review can do justice to the nuances and complexities of Gomez's argument."Southern Cultures"[A] conceptual "tour de force". No brief review can do justice to the nuances and complexities of Gomez's argument."Southern Cultures"Gomez gracefully and distinctively enlivens slaves' understandings of themselves as Igbo, Muslims, parents, children, and--eventually--Africans and Americans."Journal of Southern History"

One of the most important and thoroughly written books on black history with regards to slavery that I've ever read. Answers a lot of questions I've held for most of my life...questions I've had about where exactly do we come from and what was it like to negotiate culture, language and religion amongst

ourselves as slaves from the moment of sale or capture through placements in the Americas. Extremely enlightening book.

Exchanging Our Country Marks is a must read for anyone who has ever asked, and sincerely wanted an answer to the question, "Who, exactly, are the African Americans?" This is the book that I have been missing in my studies of African American ethnic/racial identity, and I am just now finding it, more than 10 years after its publication. Among the many illuminating points, an understanding of how race became the primary means by which an emerging ethnic collectivity self-identified was one of the greatest gems gifted. After reading this book, you will come to understand that one simply cannot rightly talk about African American ethnic identity without talking about Black racial identity. Many scholars (myself included) try to disentangle ethnicity from race and operationalize each so that they become mutually exclusive social constructs. This book illustrates why, when it comes to the matter of the African Americans, this endeavor is a futile one. I highly recommend this text along with *Slave Community*, *Slave Religion*, and *Slave Culture*.

This book is just what I needed to help me understand more about slavery and the people caught in its terrible grip. There is a section in the book about recently arrived African people and their attempts to escape from their terrible situation. The author expressed this desperate hope in such a fashion that tears came to my eyes and I felt that for the first time I had some inkling of the terror they were experiencing.

This book is of decisive importance, for by studying the convergence of an African American nationality out of the various nationalities and ethnicities that people were brought here from Africa, Michael Gomez underlines the function of the African-origins cultures and the construction of an African-American culture in a process of resistance and opposition to the enslavement, dehumanization, and degradation that Africans and their descendants have faced. Contrary to many popular assumptions, Gomez shows that in colonial and early independent America slave holders and slaves were quite aware of the different African cultures and ethnicities represented among the enslaved. Trade patterns, affinities of slave buyers for certain types of ethnicities, beliefs that some peoples were good for some tasks, others for others, led to many concentrations of slaves from the same culture and language groups in colonial America. This ensured that Africans in America tended to preserve very much of their native cultures, religions, and outlooks. Indeed, Gomez illustrates that in language and religion large sections of the African American people in becoming

retained their African religion, and at first retained their African languages, and then began our own African American language (Black English) precisely because the context of the dominant culture and its language and religion were hostile to the human dignity of Africans in America and their descendants. Gomez's solid research and clear evaluation of massive amounts of original sources upsets many ideas on African American history that were assumptions and not facts. One of the most important is the lateness and difficulty that Christianity had in gaining sizeable conversions among Africans in America and their descendants. He suggests that only by the time of the Civil War were African Americans substantially Christian. Gomez demonstrates that except for an overly assimilationist minority among "freed" slaves, Christianity only caught on where African religious practices were mixed into it. More importantly, Gomez explains the reason for the final victory of Christianity is that it could be manipulated to provide a rationale and hope of liberation from racism and oppression both metaphysical and physical, that the individual African religions could not provide. Gomez illustrates that what occurred was the development of an African American religion, rather than the adoption of a European religion. In the process, the reader will learn new and more accurate views of whence and when Africans were brought to America during the period of slavery. The reader will learn the general political and religious outlooks of the different major groups of Africans who came here. The reader will learn a survey of the historical, economic, and political upheavals in Africa wrought by the slave trade. This is a serious and important book, written at the highest level of scholarship. Thus, it is sometimes not easy reading and certainly is not written as a popular entertainment. Yet, even the casual reader who sticks with this book and turns to Gomez's notes and bibliographic material for more to read will be vastly rewarded.

This is an excellent book. I want every one of African descent to read this book. It is fantastic. This book is in my 10 list. Early on the Africans were well aware of their ethnic identities, but over time, they were forgotten, and a new people emerged. Now this took generations. It was a slow and torturous process. If you want to educate yourself about black folks in America and where they came from, and how they evolved, read this book.

Extremely detailed and academic it is slow going in the beginning but once it gets going it is quite revelatory

Gomez is an outstanding and insightful historian of African and African American Cultural. He reveals numerous topics that tantalize the reader and instigate the thirst for more.

I got this book faster than the other books I ordered but still has problems with debit card had to use gift card.

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